

'JFK' Raises Questions, But Ignores Evidence

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OLIVER STONE'S "JFK" may well move a generation to believe that a conspiracy lay behind the assassination of President Kennedy. That is its message, and a film that hits the emotions as this one does can have a profound impact.

It is right to take the movie seriously. Its charges could hardly be more serious. It suggests that Chief Justice Earl Warren was party to covering up a conspiracy. It tells us that our government cannot be trusted to give an honest account of an assassination.

The question is whether the film produces new evidence that should cause us to question the finding of the Warren Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald alone killed Kennedy. To those unfamiliar with the Warren report, much in the movie will appear new. But is it?

1. The audience was most moved, when I saw "JFK," by Abraham Zapruder's film of the president's car as he was killed. Kennedy's head snapped back. Surely, then, he must have been hit by a bullet fired from the front, not from the rear.

In fact, not just the president's head but his body moved backward. Medical experts told the commission that what happened was "a violent straightening and stiffening of the entire body." Experiments with animals shot from the rear produced just such a reaction. The physical impact of a shot from the front would not move the body back.

The bullet that hit the president in the head broke apart. Two fragments were ballistically identifiable. Tests showed that they came from Oswald's rifle. Twenty medical experts examined the autopsy photographs and X-rays. Nineteen concluded that the shots came from behind the president.

2. The Zapruder film shows that about 5.5 seconds elapsed

between a shot that wounded Kennedy and the one that killed him. Oswald fired three shots, one of which missed. "JFK" argues that Oswald could not have fired three shots from an old-style rifle in 5.5 seconds.

But Oswald could have fired the shot that missed before the two that hit, or after them, rather than between the two as the movie assumes. Then he would have had 5.5 seconds for two shots: time enough. The Warren Commission so found.

3. The movie makes much of alleged links between Oswald and Jack Ruby, who killed Oswald on Sunday, Nov. 24, 1963. It suggests that this killing was part of the cover-up.

The charge ignores unchallenged evidence. postal inspector Harry Holmes, a friend of the police captain in charge, went down to the police station that morning and was taken in to Oswald's interrogation.

When the police finished, they let Holmes ask questions—and he did, for 30 minutes. Without the accident of his presence, Oswald would have left the building long before Ruby arrived.

Every specific charge made in the movie similarly ignores extensive, for me dispositive, evidence. It gives weight to witnesses long since discredited. It does not mention the scientific findings that Oswald's gun fired the bullets that hit Kennedy and Governor John Connally.

He alleges a conspiracy among the Army, the CIA, Lyndon Johnson and endless others: without a shred of evidence.

I have no illusion that facts will dispel Oliver Stone's fantasy. The thirst for some deeper, darker truth is unquenchable in America. We want the answer. We want to open some file and find the conspiracy. But we never shall.

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